

## HELPING VULNERABLE FAMILIES:

OUR BIBBS POPULATION  
– AT A GLANCE

**5,000**

– pregnancies being recruited into BiBBS study 54% - mothers who are migrants

**1-IN-3**

– have difficulty understanding English  
84.% - live in the most deprived communities

**1-IN-4**

– are financially insecure

**46%**

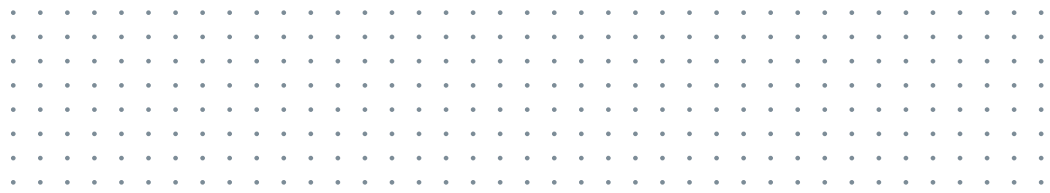
– reported feelings of depression

**1/3**

– said they felt anxious

**7**

– years of recruitment into project



## EVIDENCE BRIEFING

### BETTER START:

IMPROVING THE EVIDENCE BASE  
OF WHAT WORKS TO GIVE CHILDREN  
THE BEST START IN LIFE



## KEY CONTACT

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## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

What happens in the **first few years of a child's life** is critical in shaping their **health, wellbeing and opportunities** for the rest of their lives.

Socially-disadvantaged children have **far worse early outcomes** compared to their peers - by age 5 children from deprived communities and some ethnic minorities are far more likely to be **overweight and have worse developmental outcomes**, making them **less ready to learn at school**.

There is **strong evidence** that offering the right support in these **critical early years** will improve children's **life chances and reduce inequalities**, but there are **very few** evidence-based interventions that have been **proven** to reduce these inequalities.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The health, developmental and educational inequalities of children living in inner city areas of Bradford are some of the **worst in the country**.

In three inner-city wards, **Better Start Bradford** (a National Lottery Community Fund programme) delivers multiple early years add-on interventions to improve the **nutrition, socio-emotional** and **language development** of children aged 0-4.

These are delivered by **local authority, health, and voluntary** and **charitable** sector organisations (*see table on next page*).







Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing, Parenting, Preparing for birth

### Baby Steps – Information for Families

Get support every step of the way on your journey to parenthood (for expectant families).

[Read more about Baby Steps – Information for Families >](#)



Activities with children, Exercise and getting outdoors, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing

### Better Place

The Better Place project is working with local people to create safer, healthier and fun places across the Better Start Bradford area. Where will your next adventure be?

[Read more about Better Place >](#)



Activities with children, Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Meeting other parents / carers, Speech and language development

### Better Start Imagine – Information for Families

Sign up to receive free books for your child, plus come along to story and rhyme time sessions in local community venues (for families with children aged 0-4).

[Read more about Better Start Imagine – Information for Families >](#)



Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Feeding preparation, Mental health and wellbeing, Practical and emotional support, Preparing for birth

### Bradford Doulas – Information for Families

Receive emotional and practical support from a volunteer doula before, during and after birth (for women who are 28+ weeks' pregnant).

[Read more about Bradford Doulas – Information for Families >](#)



Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Feeding & healthy eating, Feeding preparation, Practical and emotional support, Preparing for birth

### Breastfeeding Support Project – Information for Families

Free, friendly breastfeeding and mixed feeding support in your own home or over the phone (for expectant families or families with a baby under 6 months).

[Read more about Breastfeeding Support Project – Information for Families >](#)



Activities with children, Feeding & healthy eating, Meeting other parents / carers, Parenting

### Cooking for a Better Start – Information for Families

A free course run in local community venues to help you cook healthy family food on a budget (for families with children aged 0-3).

[Read more about Cooking for a Better Start – Information for Families >](#)



English language skills, Meeting other parents / carers, Preparing for birth

### ESOL for Pregnancy – Information for Families

Friendly English language classes and support for pregnant women to help them communicate with their midwife and feel more in control, delivered by Shipley College

[Read more about ESOL for Pregnancy – Information for Families >](#)



Activities with children, English language skills, Meeting other parents / carers, Speech and language development

### ESOL with Infants – Information for Families

Fun English language classes for you and your child, held in community venues (for families with children aged up to 2), delivered by Shipley College

[Read more about ESOL with Infants – Information for Families >](#)



Activities with children, Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Exercise and getting outdoors, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing

### Forest School Play Project – Family Play Sessions

Fun, free outdoor play sessions in a park near you, for families with children aged 0-3

[Read more about Forest School Play Project – Family Play Sessions >](#)



Activities with children, Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Exercise and getting outdoors, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing, Speech and language development

### Happy Early Years (HEY!) Fund

Parents, grandparents and other adult carers in the Better Start Bradford area can apply for up to £2,500 to develop ideas and initiatives for local families and their 0-3s and expectant parents.

[Read more about Happy Early Years \(HEY!\) Fund >](#)



Exercise and getting outdoors, Feeding & healthy eating, Meeting other parents / carers, Parenting

### HENRY Healthy Families – Information for Families

Free, friendly group programmes and workshops to help you and your family become healthier and happier (for families with children aged 0-3).

[Read more about HENRY Healthy Families – Information for Families >](#)



Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Mental health and wellbeing, Practical and emotional support

### Home-Start Better Start – Information for Families

Get support from a trained volunteer – a listening ear and a helping hand when and where you need it.

[Read more about Home-Start Better Start – Information for Families >](#)



Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Meeting other parents / carers, Parenting

### Incredible Years – Information for Families

Join this group parenting programme to help you connect with your toddler (for families with children aged 12 to 36 months)

[Read more about Incredible Years – Information for Families >](#)

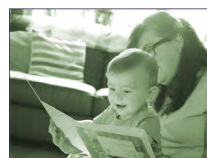


Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing

### Little Minds Matter – Information for Families

Having a baby is a big change and can be challenging. The Little Minds Matter team is there to support you and your baby to have the best start in life.

[Read more about Little Minds Matter – Information for Families >](#)



Attachment and parent-infant relationships, Meeting other parents / carers, Mental health and wellbeing, Practical and emotional support

### Perinatal Support Service – Information for Families

Support sessions with volunteers trained in listening, during pregnancy and the first year after birth.

[Read more about Perinatal Support Service – Information for Families >](#)

Multiple early years add-on interventions to improve the nutrition, socio-emotional and language development of children aged 0-4





To evaluate this programme, and to enhance the evidence base of early years interventions, Born in Bradford set up the Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub.

This includes the **world's first interventional birth cohort** – Born in Bradford's Better Start (BiBBS) <sup>[1]</sup> which is designed to evaluate the interventions being delivered.

BiBBS **recruits mothers and children** living in the Better Start areas.

Women complete an **in-depth survey during pregnancy**, agree to give **biological samples** and to have their and their child's **routine health and education data** linked.

Recruitment began in 2016 and will continue until 2023 with a target recruitment of **5,000 pregnancies**.

## WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?

### The BiBBS population includes a high proportion of vulnerable families

Analysis of the first 2,600 BiBBS participants <sup>[4]</sup> has shown recruitment of a **representative and highly-ethnically-diverse sample** (61% Pakistani, 12% White British, 6% Central and Eastern European and 6% other South Asian). Over half of the mothers (54%) are migrants to the UK and 32% have **difficulty understanding English**. The majority (84%) of families live in the **most deprived** decile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and many families are **financially insecure** (23%). Almost half (46%) of mothers reported symptoms of **depression** and 30% **anxiety**.



## How to integrate research into practice

We have developed practical strategies and tools for **researchers, public health commissioners and service providers** to enable them to work together to evaluate interventions delivered in real-life settings <sup>[2]</sup>.

Comprehensive toolkits include:

- **An operational guide through the service design process**
- **An implementation and monitoring guide**
- **An evaluation framework**

The evaluation framework incorporates implementation evaluation <sup>[3]</sup> to enable understanding of intervention performance in practice, and quasi experimental approaches to infer causal effects in a timely manner <sup>[1]</sup>.

### There is variation in engagement with the interventions

85% of families had engaged in **one or more of the Better Start interventions** <sup>[4]</sup>.

We found that the **type of intervention** has an influence on engagement. For example, interventions that require active participation (e.g. having to proactively enrol / attend a session) had an 80% participation rate **compared to 99% in interventions that require passive participation** (e.g. enrolled as a part of standard practice / no active attendance).

Similarly, interventions that required a short-term commitment (2-6 weeks) had **higher levels of participation** (91%) than those that required a longer-term (>12 weeks) commitment (78%).



## Enhancing the evidence base

We have been able to **enhance the evidence base** of all of the early years interventions delivered by Better Start. For most interventions we have shown that they are feasible for delivery and are acceptable to families in the community <sup>[5]</sup>.

We have also shown that some interventions are not appropriate for Better Start Bradford communities which has led to their **de-commissioning** and the **re-allocation of funding to more suitable interventions**.

For example, the **Family Nurse Partnership** is an evidence-based intervention aimed at supporting vulnerable young mothers. In the Better Start areas we found there were not enough mothers who were eligible and/or who wanted this service. **The project has been replaced by another evidence-based intensive home visiting intervention called Mesch**. Evaluation of that project is now underway <sup>[5]</sup>.

## We have also demonstrated evidence of impact for some projects

We have evaluated **Talking Together**, a Bradford developed home-based intervention designed for two-year-olds who are **at risk of language delay** using a feasibility Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) - **the oTTER study**.

This study found evidence that **children's language abilities may improve** after they take part in Talking Together and parents reported an **improved relationship with their child** <sup>[6]</sup>.

We have shown that women who received the **Continuity of Carer** midwifery model were **more satisfied** with their care, more likely to feel able to **disclose mental health issues**, and had **increased confidence in birth choices** than women receiving standard care. Midwives also had more **job satisfaction**.

We are now completing an RCT of this model of care in an ethnically-diverse population and are looking at the impact on **birth** and **mental health outcomes** <sup>[7]</sup>.

Other causal evaluations are currently underway including **Babysteps, Incredible Years Toddler, HENRY** and more.

## The 0-19 Core Outcomes Framework

Based on the learning of BSBIH and Better Start Bradford, we worked with **partners from key services across Bradford joined together** in a task and finish group to co-produce a 0-19 Children and Young Peoples' shared outcomes framework that measures important aspects of children and young peoples' **safety, health and development**.

The aim of this shared 0-19 outcomes framework is to:

- **Enable regular, in-depth, locality-based, needs assessment (see figure below)**
- **Evaluate the impact of interventions through improved outcomes over time**
- **Act as a catalyst for a single shared child record across organisations.**
- **The framework will now be used to evaluate the Start for Life programme locally, and has been adopted within the Children and Young People's Strategy for the District**

ALIYA IS BORN IN WHARFEDALE	ELIZA IS BORN IN KEIGHLEY WEST	ADAM IS BORN IN BOWLING + BARKEREND
<1 in 1000 of her friends will die in infancy	9 in 1000 will die in infancy	3 in 1000 will die in infancy
1 in 10 of her friends will see domestic violence	2 in 10 will see domestic violence	1.5 in 10 will see domestic violence
<1 in 10,000 of her friends will end up in care	118 in 10,000 will end up in care	108 in 10,000 will end up in care
78% of her friends have an expected level of development (ASQ age 2)	58% have an expected level of development (ASQ age 2)	70% have an expected level of development (ASQ age 2)
69% of Ariana's friends will be school ready (EYFS GLD)	67% of Eliza's friends will be school ready (EYFS GLD)	56% of Adam's friends will be school ready (EYFS GLD)

The 0-19 Core Outcomes Framework

## WHAT HAS CHANGED AS A RESULT?

Our evidence has **encouraged commissioners** to fund **some projects into other areas** across the district, including a number of Better Start Bradford projects now being delivered through the Best Start for Life programme in Bradford.

Our evidence has helped services to **change the way they collect information** so that they are better able to **identify and support new mothers** who struggle with their **mental health**.

The council and other services in Bradford are looking at ways to support **vulnerable families**, and those who have **difficulty understanding English**, to access their services more easily.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

- **Local evaluation of interventions delivered in services is essential** to find out whether interventions can be a) delivered as designed within the local context; b) reach and engage the intended population within Bradford; c) have an impact on outcomes. The BSBIH team are keen to support high quality evaluation of interventions across the district.
- **We need to understand the reasons that some families don't access and engage with the early years services** that are offered. The reasons for this need to be better understood and interventions adapted to make sure they reach those who need them the most. The BiB team are currently planning research to understand the reasons for this, based on both personal and environmental circumstances. Findings will be shared with services to enable improved reach of services.
- Data shared across all of the organisations involved in the care of children needs to be shared better to ensure all children at risk are identified early, receive preventative interventions and appropriate safeguarding. Connected Bradford has pulled together all of this data for research purposes, but we would like to now receive **support from all organisations to develop a shared child record for use in practice**.



## REFERENCES

1. Dickerson J, Bird P, McEachan RRC, *et al.* Born in Bradford's Better Start: an experimental birth cohort study to evaluate the impact of early life interventions. *BMC Public Health*, 2016, 16(1), pp.1–14. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3318-0>.
2. Dickerson, J, Bird PK, Bryant M, *et al.* [Integrating research and system-wide practice in public health: lessons learnt from Better Start Bradford](#) *BMC Public Health*. 2019 DOI [10.1186/s12889-019-6554-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6554-2)
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4. Dickerson J, Bridges S, Willan K *et al.* Born in Bradford's Better Start (BiBBS) interventional birth cohort study: Interim cohort profile [version 1; peer review: 1 approved]. *Wellcome Open Res* 2022, 7:244 (<https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.18394.1>)
5. [BSB Innovation Hub - Born In Bradford](#)
6. Bowyer-Crane C, Nielsen D, Bryant M, Heald R, Storr C, Dickerson J. The oTTER project - A feasibility and process evaluation protocol of Talking Together. Pilot and Feasibility Studies. 2019: 119.
7. Dharni, N., Essex, H., Bryant, M.J., Cronin de Chavez, A., Willan, K., Farrar, D., Bywater, T., Dickerson, J. The key components of a successful model of midwifery-led continuity of carer, without continuity at birth: findings from a qualitative implementation evaluation. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* **21**, 205 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-021-03671-2>